

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION
OF H.R. 3246, REGIONAL ECO-
NOMIC AND INFRASTRUCTURE
DEVELOPMENT ACT OF 2007

SPEECH OF

HON. SILVESTRE REYES

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2007

Mr. REYES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 3246, the Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act of 2007, which will help spur economic development in my district of El Paso, Texas. I would like to thank Chairman OBERSTAR for his vision regarding the need and importance of regional authorities for development in areas of the country with huge economic need. For the past three Congresses, I have introduced my bill, the Southwest Regional Border Authority Act, in an attempt to bring some relief to the U.S.-Mexico border and my district of El Paso, Texas. This year, under the leadership of Chairman OBERSTAR, my bill has been included into his overall legislation. I would also like to thank many of my colleagues who represent districts along the U.S.-Mexico border for their support in the creation of the Southwest Regional Border Authority.

The Chairman's bill would authorize \$1.25 billion over the period of FY 2008 through FY 2012 for five regional commissions one of which will be created in the U.S.-Mexico border region. The Authorities would be Federal-State partnerships for providing assistance to economically distressed and underdeveloped areas that have experienced high levels of unemployment, poverty, or out-migration. Three of the commissions would be new and would assist areas in the Southeastern United States and areas along the Mexican and Canadian borders; two of the commissions would replace existing authorities in the Delta and Northern Great Plains regions. The bill would establish uniform administrative structures and responsibilities for the commissions, and authorize the commissions to provide financial assistance for projects and programs in their respective regions to develop transportation and infrastructure, provide job skills training and support business development.

The Southwest border region, as defined in the bill, includes all counties within 150 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border. This region contains 11 counties in New Mexico, 65 counties in Texas, 10 counties in Arizona, and 7 counties in California, with a combined population of approximately 29 million.

According to research compiled by the Interagency Task Force on the Economic Development of the Southwest Border, 20 percent of the residents in my region live below the poverty level, unemployment rates often reach as high as five times the national average, and a lack of adequate access to capital has created economic disparities making it difficult for businesses to start up in the region. Border communities have long endured a depressed economy and low-paying jobs. Our economic challenges partly stem from our position as a border community.

Economic development in border communities is difficult to stimulate without assistance from the Government, private sector, and community organizations. H.R. 3246 would

help foster planning to encourage infrastructure improvements, technology deployment, education and workforce training, and community development through entrepreneurship.

Modeled in part after the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Southwest Border Regional Authority and other Authorities would follow four guiding principles:

First, the Authorities would fund proposals designed at the local level followed by approval at the state level in order to meet regional economic development goals;

Second, projects leading to the creation of a diversified regional economy would be prioritized. Currently, states and counties often are forced to compete against each other for limited funding;

Third, the Authorities would be independent agencies. This would prevent them from having to attempt to satisfy another Federal agency's mission requirements when determining which projects to fund; and

Finally, the Authorities would be comprised of one Senate-confirmed Federal representative and the governors of the States of jurisdiction.

For too long, many areas of our country including the southwest border region have been ignored, overlooked, and underfunded. We need to recognize the challenges facing these under-served areas and help them make the most of their many assets. I believe the authorities created in the Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act of 2007 would go a long way toward achieving the goal of economic prosperity in some of the poorest regions of our country.

Again, I would like to thank Chairman OBERSTAR for his leadership on this issue and look forward to the implementation of this important legislation. I ask my colleagues to support this important measure.

RECOGNIZING THE CAREER AND
ACHIEVEMENTS OF RICK DIEGEL

HON. GARY L. ACKERMAN

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 9, 2007

Mr. ACKERMAN. Madam Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the tremendous service to the working man and woman of America by a true friend, Rick Diegel. Rick recently retired after working for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) in a distinguished career that spanned 38 years.

After a stint in the U.S. Air Force, Rick's IBEW career began in 1969 when he joined Corpus Christi Local 278 in his native Texas. Always active in politics, Rick also served three terms as mayor pro tem in the city of Ingleside in the early and mid-1970's. Rick was elected business manager for Local 278 in 1977, and he arrived upon the Washington political scene in 1983 when he was appointed IBEW's Political Director, the same year I was elected to Congress. Then, in 1998, he became director of the IBEW's combined Political/Legislative Department, the position he held until his retirement October 1st, 2007.

Upon Rick's arrival in Washington, Rick Diegel immediately made an impact on public policy on behalf of the IBEW and its members. Through the support given to IBEW-endorsed candidates in local, state, and federal elec-

tions, the IBEW has been able to influence the agenda on vital kitchen-table issues such as job security, the minimum wage, healthcare, working conditions and safety, retirement, and trade. Rick became a major figure in the modern labor movement and helped lead the transformation of the IBEW into the 21st Century.

Madam Speaker, I want to commend Rick's tireless dedication to the members of the IBEW and the labor movement as a whole over his almost four-decade career. He will be truly missed by me and the IBEW.

Rick will be returning to Texas, where he will be able to have more time with his wife Theresa, his seven children, and four grandchildren. Fortunately, Rick isn't completely leaving the political arena though—he has promised to be available to aid HILLARY CLINTON's Presidential campaign, so we won't be losing him entirely.

Madam Speaker, I ask all my colleagues to join me in thanking Rick Diegel for all of his hard work and dedication as IBEW's lead political architect for over 20 years and in wishing him and his family the best of luck in his retirement.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. RON KIND

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 9, 2007

Mr. KIND. Madam Speaker, on Monday, October 1, 2007, I was detained in my district and was unable to have my votes recorded on the House floor for H. Con. Res. 185 (Roll No. 924), H.R. 2276 (Roll No. 925), and H.R. 3325 (Roll No. 926). Had I been present, I would have voted in favor of these measures.

COMMEMORATING THE 20TH ANNI-
VERSARY OF GRAPEVINE OPRY

HON. KENNY MARCHANT

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 9, 2007

Mr. MARCHANT. Madam Speaker, today I rise to recognize Grapevine Opry in Grapevine, Texas on the occasion of its 20th Anniversary of continuous family entertainment.

Originally built as Grapevine's Palace Theatre in November 21, 1940, this historic building was reopened in 1974 by a Grapevine dance instructor, Chisai Childs, for dance recitals. Its use evolved into a musical revue stage show and was dubbed "Grapevine Opry".

After many failed business partnerships, Grapevine Opry doors closed in 1984 and its fate seemed doomed forever. However, one year later, a new owner began renovation of the theater only to see the stage, roof and building partially destroyed by fire due to contractor negligence. But renovations began anew and on November 14, 1987, Grapevine Opry reopened with Mr. Rocky Gribble as the new producer and bandleader. In 1990, ownership sold the property to a local attorney's company, Grapevine Opry, Inc.

Bad times almost fell again on the Opry when in 1991, the Grapevine Opry, Inc. filed